

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:46

ANSWERED ON:27.07.2005

STRENGTHENING OF INDO BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Mollah Shri Hannan;Nikhil Kumar Shri

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether differences have surfaced between India and Bangladesh over border fencing as reported in the 'Statesman' dated June 23, 2005;
- (b) if so, the details in this regard;
- (c) whether the Government has decided to make efforts to sort out the differences and ensure that border fencing work is completed without any hurdles;
- (d) if so, the details thereof and the steps taken/proposed to be taken in this direction; and
- (e) the measures undertaken to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED)

(a) to (e) A statement is placed on the table of the house.

The Statement referred to in Part (a) to (e) of Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 46 to be answered on 27-7-2005 titled 'Strengthening of Indo-Bangladesh Relations':

(a to e) The differences between India and Bangladesh on the fencing of the border lie in the interpretation of the 1975 Joint India-Bangladesh Border Guidelines. Clause 8 (e) of the guidelines states that 'if defensive works of any nature, including trenches, exist in the stretch of 300 yards (150 yards on each side of the boundary) these must be destroyed or filled up.'. It is our view that the boundary fence is not a defensive structure but an instrument of border management meant to control illegal cross border movements, smuggling, infiltration, etc. For the most part, the fence is located at or beyond 150 yards of the border. However, in certain stretches due to habitations or necessitated by terrain conditions, the fence would fall within 150 yards from the zero line. However Bangladesh has objected to the construction of the fence within 150 yards of the zero line on the basis that this is in violation of the jointly agreed 1975 Border Guidelines.

The Governments of India and Bangladesh have established several mechanisms to discuss border-related issues. The issue of fencing was discussed during the Home Secretary-level talks held in September 2004 and in the Foreign Office Consultations between the Foreign Secretaries of India and Bangladesh in New Delhi in June 2005. This issue is regularly discussed during the Director General-level meetings of Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). It would be taken up again during the forthcoming Home Secretary-level talks as well as the BSF-BDR talks. We have also conveyed to the Government of Bangladesh the need for us to build the fence within and up to the zero line on the International border necessitated by terrain and habitations and that we would carry out the necessary, repair and developmental works on the Indian side of the International Boundary. In this regard, details of the villages, houses and population within 150 yards of the India-Bangladesh border and a list of works taken up and kept suspended due to objections by BDR has also been sent to the Government of Bangladesh. The same was also reiterated during the Foreign Office Consultations held in June 2005.

India's commitment to strengthen bilateral relations with Bangladesh was expressed at the highest level by the Prime Minister during his meeting with the Bangladesh Prime Minister on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in July 2004. Bangladesh Foreign Minister has visited India twice in May-June 2004 and November 2004. Other Ministerial visits from Bangladesh include those of Minister of Commerce in November 2004, Minister of Finance in December 2004 and Bangladesh Health Minister in April 2005. Official level meetings included those of the Home Secretaries, and Water Resources Secretaries in September 2004 and Foreign Office Consultations in June 2005. During these meetings, both sides reaffirmed the importance that they attach to bilateral relations and expressed their desire to further expand, deepen and strengthen cooperation. Meetings between the border guarding forces are held regularly. Bilateral trade and commercial relations continue to show healthy growth. Bilateral discussions have been held under the Joint Working Groups on Trade and Tariffs issues and the Joint Customs Group to address and initiate various measures for facilitating the flow of trade. The next Joint Working Groups on Trade and Tariff issues are scheduled to meet in August 2005 in Dhaka where issues pertaining to bilateral trade, Free Trade Agreement and elimination of para-tariff and non-tariff barriers would be discussed further.

